

***Painlessly Generating Revenue Through Animal Welfare Programs***  
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We are all looking for ways to painlessly generate additional revenues to provide essential services to our communities. The most overlooked sources of revenue exist in our animal control and welfare programs.

The NJ Local Boards of Health Association participates in Sustainable Jersey's Animals in the Community Task Force. One issue addressed was the creation of a sustainable animal control and welfare program which allows you to meet your legal obligations through enhanced compliance with existing statutes and municipal ordinances without increasing the tax burden. Additional revenues can also be generated by insuring that Animal Control Officers servicing your community are certified and appointed as Animal Cruelty Investigators.

Based partially on the findings of that Task Force, this article will suggest ways your municipality can do just that. Millions of dollars in revenue are lost throughout the state through low compliance with animal registration.

#### EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are approximately 8.9 million people in NJ living in 3.2 million households with 2.70 residents per household (US Census Bureau). According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), one of every two homes in your community has a dog or cat. In addition, several recognized formulas indicate that between 600,000 to 1.4 million feral/free roaming cats also exist in the state.

Does this pose an issue/challenge for each municipality? **A RESOUNDING YES!**

These challenges include rabies control, environmental impacts, car accidents, neighborhood nuisance calls, animal cruelty and rescuing animals in emergencies.

Municipal animal control is based upon fundamental public health issues relating to the control of diseases such as rabies that can be transmitted to humans. The state of NJ mandates licensing of all dogs. The majority of municipalities require the licensing of cats through municipal ordinances. The revenues generated from the licensing of dogs is shared between the state and the municipality. In contrast, the revenues from cat licenses are completely reserved for the municipality. It's estimated that despite these requirements, less than 20 percent of domestic animals in our communities required to be licensed, are actually licensed; causing both a major loss of revenue and threat to public safety.

## HOW MANY CATS AND DOGS EXIST IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

According to a NJ Department of Health document issued in May 2013 titled; *Estimating Dog and Cat Populations Based on Human Populations*, you can estimate the number of dogs and cats in your municipality based on the number of your households. To estimate number of households, divide the population by 2.7 persons per household.

To estimate the **dog population**: multiply the number of households by **.584**. For example, if the population of a municipality is 10,000 residents, there are approximately 3,700 households. 3,700 households multiplied by .584 = 2,163 owned dogs in that municipality.

To estimate the **cat population**: multiply the number of households by **.641**. For example, if the population of the municipality is 10,000 residents, there are approximately 3,700 households. 3,700 households multiplied by .641 = 2,371 owned cats in that municipality.

## HOW MUCH REVENUE ARE YOU LOSING?

Each of our municipalities has a unique population. Results may be impacted by socio-economic and cultural variances. Nonetheless, these formulas are a valuable guide for estimating how many dogs and cats you may have in your town. Now find out how many are actually registered.

Multiply licensing fees by the difference and that is the revenue you are losing! While that figure represents full compliance, look at how much revenue even 50%, 60% or 70% would generate, particularly if you have a cat licensing ordinance where every dollar stays right in your town.

While some of these new funds are discretionary as to how you use them, ideally all funds should be used to offset animal welfare costs your community.

## SUSTAINABLE JERSEY'S ANIMALS IN THE COMMUNITY ENHANCED COMPLIANCE PROGRAM

Many of these simple concepts have proved successful in Calgary Canada and are easily adopted in our municipalities. Increase the perceived value of the license.

Increase revenues by encouraging pet owners to voluntarily comply, through incentives, with state laws and ordinances that already exist. Increased fees would be complemented by decreased expenditure for such items as shelter holding and euthanasia costs. Stress the value to a pet owner to have his animal licensed. This program helps educate owners

in your community about the values of voluntary compliance for their animal's safety. In order to accomplish this, the Task Force recommended a three-pronged approach.

- 1. Educate.** Reach out to the community. Explain the value and legal requirements of licensing as part of an ongoing educational process to increase awareness of animal welfare. Utilize the *Community Animal Welfare Education Press Release Kit* available at [www.njlbha.org](http://www.njlbha.org). Included in that kit are sample press releases on a variety of subjects relating to animal welfare designed for use in your municipality.
- 2. Incentivize.** Pet owners need to see the value of compliance with registration and license requirements. "Free Ride Home" programs for licensed animals stress the advantage of having your wandering licensed pet literally driven home rather than brought to a shelter for adoption. The municipality works with local businesses to create a mutually beneficial program whereby people who license pets are given a coupon book that provides discounts from designated businesses including veterinarians, pet supply stores, hotels, restaurants, entertainment, automotive, etc. The discounts given by local vendors would far outweigh the small cost of licensing.
- 3. Enforce.** You have an obligation to enforce state law and municipal ordinances. Not to do so puts an undue burden on the community that must make up the lost revenue in property taxes.

Part of obtaining compliance is enforcement. While the hope is that the primary carrot approach of education and incentives will be effective in increased licensing, your municipality has to recommit to enforcing those existing laws and ordinances that you are already bound to enforce. An animal census should be an ongoing responsibility of the municipality. When an animal is noted to be on a property and there is no record of its registration, a compliance letter should be sent explaining the advantages of voluntary compliance, also noting the potential fines involved in noncompliance. There will be occasions where you may have to take an individual to court to force compliance. Fines generated will further assist in your animal welfare programs.

## ADDITIONAL WAYS TO FACILITATE REGISTRATION

### Increase the ease of licensing pets

Many towns require that the resident contact the municipal clerk's office to request an application. This is a barrier to licensing. Expand the locations where applications are available to pet owners. In addition to all local municipal buildings, pet owners should be able to pick up license applications at libraries, pet shops, veterinary offices, supermarkets and other local businesses. Postage paid addressed envelopes can be valuable in assisting in compliance. Veterinarians should be requested to inform patient's owners of the

requirement and advantages of licensing their pet, as well as having a registration form available to give to them. Municipalities should consider online registration as an option.

### Encourage Compliance

Another possibility is to create a Pet License Amnesty Month where pet owners could license their pets without fear of penalty, late fees or summons.

Additionally, there should be a graduated scale of licensing fees to encourage owners to license all animals in their home. Ordinances limiting the number of pets in the home are often counter-productive in regard to licensing and repeal should be considered.

### Insure that all Animal Control Officers are also Animal Cruelty Investigators

This is another sure revenue producer. An Animal Cruelty Investigator (ACI) is a Certified Animal Control Officer who has completed the NJ Police Training Commission and the NJ Dept. of Health approved Basic Animal Cruelty Investigators Course.

Similar to regular police, they must be appointed by a municipality as an ACI before they can exercise law enforcement authority. Powers include issuing summonses and making arrests as it relates to violations of the Animal Cruelty Statutes in NJSA Title 4 (NJSA 4:19-15.16b). They are part of your municipal team with a 24/7 quick community response.

Under existing statutes, if a police officer issues a summons for an animal cruelty offense, all fine money goes to either the state or county chapter of the SPCA which is a private volunteer based corporation. However, if an Animal Cruelty Investigator issues a summons for a violation relating to the animal cruelty statutes, half the fine money at least stays in your municipality, (NJSA 4:19-15.16b and NJSA 4:22-55b). It's in your best interest to insure that all animal control officers servicing your community are trained and appointed as ACI's.